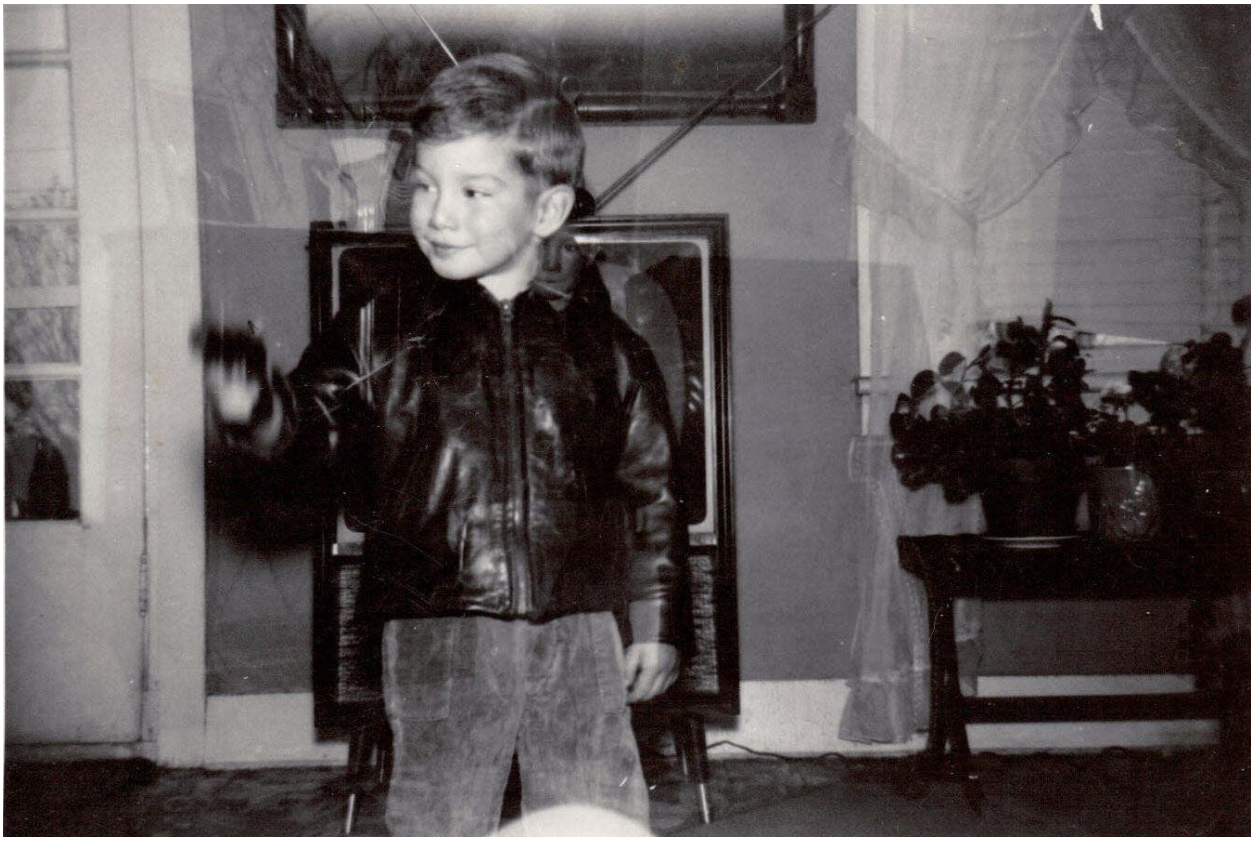

Chapter -3-

Dog Days in the Atomic Age

The summer of 1956 saw me eating homemade ice cream under the vast canopy of stars while gazing at the endless seas of misty lighting bugs. Concerning male and female relationships; animal behavior was how mother nature choose to educate me. I would help my grandmother gather eggs from the hen house. Some of the older rosters had no tail feathers. And I began to notice how the females would gang up on a misbehaving males. Any bad actor would be chased and have their bloody tail feathers plucked out. That's when I realized that the females ruled the roost. For Real! Females ruled the planet.

Sometimes the females would not leave their boxes so grandmother would poke them with a stick so as to gather their eggs. Other times, the older females would peck back and put up a fight. These were targeted for butchering. My uncle Tommy was a master at wringing chicken necks. He just grab them by the neck and whirl them with a snap crackle pop! Yet, most times after their neck were broken at a 45 degree angle, they still tried to run away. WTF? If he had a lot of butchering to do he would use an axe to cut off their heads by grabbing the feet. It was and amazing sight to see a headless hen, squirting blood, trying to run away. I began to notice that all the males seem to disappear at butchering time. The roosters always knew when death was coming. Fact is I never saw a rooster ever get butchered. But the vermin always when for the older roosters at night. My uncles were always shooting foxes, snakes and skunks. But they use poison on the rats. The rats were fucking huge and the geese love to eat their babies. Pity the rat that got in the cow pen. He got crushed like a grape. The texas longhorns didn't cotten to rats in their pen.

My uncle butch had it in his mind that I'd be a farmer someday so he tried to teach me how to cut a bull's balls off. WTF? But most of the time I was always able to scram it to the woods and avoid that kind training. Some of those bulls weighed in at 1600 pounds and I was terrified of them. But my uncle butch would herd them into a stall that had a small window then expertly snip 10 pound of bull balls in a buck, which by the way, got fed to the chickens who greedily devour those taste morsels. Flop! Cockerdoodle-do! Shark feed! Yummy Yummy!

All the bulls feared and loathed my uncle. If they didn't obey he would bust a 2 by 4 on their heads or tailbones. Bulls hated that shit. Sometimes we would sell a bull to stud. Oh Boy! Those younger bulls who still retain their mighty nuggets were always trouble to transport. I always stayed in the truck and watched in safety. Sometimes we would have to shoot a rogue bull or hog. One time I remember hiding in the barn so as to avoid Sunday church. I've always hated church. It was not my thing. When my family returned from service I turn up and claim I forgot all about mass. Terribly sorry! Won't happen again. However, to my surprise my grandmother was pulling the guts out of a hog they had just butchered. It was fucking huge. Maybe 300 pounds. She had buckets of guts. She ask me to help but I beat fucking feet right out of there.

For some strange reason my uncle had raised a goldfish in a 10 foot by 3 foot watering trough that he used for the cows. The goldfish was about 5 pounds. It loved the trough cause bugs got into the water. I have no idea if it served any purpose other than to keep the water clean of bugs. The cows really like the fish for some reason. I watched it eat a lot of bugs and water spiders. In one of the cow pastures my uncle had set up an electric fence. This deterred the cows from going into the apple, grape and raspberry orchards. That fence could knock a cow for a loop if it touched it. For fun I would make a spear and go crawdaddy gigging. I had to travel near the fence to get to the woods. So I would stay far away from the fence. A lot of tweety birds die by that wire and the vermin could always count on a free lunch.

One day in august of 1958 my grandmother warned me that it was "Dog Days" and not to go into the water. During late August the virus & bacteria, along with agricultural waste would reach its maximum strength and run off into the streams. In the early 1950's a major polio outbreak had just occurred in the United States. The state of Ohio required all first graders to have their shots. My aunt told me it was the government's inoculation that caused my polio. Who knows. But I believe it was from the crawdaddy gigging. A few hours after I returned from the stream I came down with a high fever and became paralyzed. My dad was at sea doing "spy shit" and my mother was doing "electroconvulsive shock therapy and eating Thorazine pills" in the nuthouse. So my aunt and grandmother rushed me to children hospital where I spent 15 months trying to learn how to walk again. The type of polio I had was suppose to kill me but inside an iron lung; which did my breathing, I was able to slowly regain control of my lungs.

After about 3 months in an iron lung they moved me to the polio isolation ward at children's hospital in columbus ohio. There were about 5 or 6 kids in the same boat as me. Thus began a rigorous regiment of about 15 injections 3 times a day. They would wrap me in steaming hot wool blankets and take me into a lab and stick a copper wire up my spine and shock my

nerves shitless in hope of regenerating them. The pain was beyond endurance and most times I would pass out. Jonas Edward Salk was an American medical researcher and virologist. He discovered and developed one of the first successful polio vaccines. I was told that he was handling my case. After a few months of this routine I was able to sit up on my own unaided. Then I started physical therapy in a heated swim pool and was able to get into a wheelchair. Back then the charity March of Dimes and Easter Seals helped raise funds for polio kids like me. Me and another girl from my floor were chosen by then **Governor C. William O'Neill** (January 14, 1957 – January 12, 1959) to light the Christmas tree on the statehouse steps. We also did photo ops with **Ruth Lyons**, the host of cincinnati TV show 50/50 Club, to raise money at easter for us polio kids.

I spend the Christmas of 1958 alone in the polio isolation ward at children's hospital in columbus ohio. None of my family were allowed on that quarantined floor. It had been 6 months without any contact with my family. That Christmas eve I cried myself to sleep. I was scared and alone and these strangers were “hurting me all the time”. The only people I saw through the Iron lung window were the nurses and doctors doing their rounds. I was terrified of the doctors and nurses because every time they came around I ended up being shocked or injected.

Finally months later, after I could proved to the doctors I could walk in braces and crutches, they let me return to the family farm. The braces would hurt and cause sores on my legs. The doctors had told my family that I would never walk again. But I was determined to walk again. Fuck that! As my health improved I was enrolled for the first grade at Jefferson Elementary. By this time my mother would get a weekend pass and visit sis and I on the farm. I was terrified of her but at least she was trying to heal the wounds. One day, Spot my uncle’s dog, attacked me and bit my face 3 times. The dog hated me and I was afraid to go near it. Eventually, it got rabies from a racoon bite and my uncle shot it. Because I was in the hospital from ages 5 to 6 I started first grade at 7 years old. I had never socialize with other children up until then. For the most part I didn’t understand how to react to them. Who the fuck are these people? Suddenly I was thrust into a class for spoiled brats. I had no idea how relate. It wasn’t until I was 50 that I learned how to say “no” to others. By then I had mastered it and had learned to read their selfish manipulations.

My grandmother was into making the kids she raised pick their own “switches”. I remember one time when she chased my sister into the bathroom. My sister instinctively locked the door and refused to come out. Grandmother started to argue then tried to use ice cream as a bribe. Sissy told my grandmother than if she wouldn’t spank her she would come out. She told my grandmother to slide the switch under the door. But my grandmother was really slick. She had picked two switches and it ended up with my sister getting her ass beat. Grandmother did not play around when it comes to choosing switches. If you tried to pick a small weak stick she go out to the bush tree and pick the biggest fuck switch she could find. Your ass was doomed!

If you worked in the farm fields far away from any rest room you did your business where you could. God forbid if you forgot to bring the toilet paper! In that case a stick, leaf or corn cob would have to make do. Ouch! Most of the spring and fall my uncle worked from sunup to sundown. A few times I used to sneak up and watch my uncles struggle with their “dumb ass situations”. They would be pissed off at themselves and cursing up a storm.

In the fall of 1960 I entered the 2rd grade at Jefferson Elementary. Mildred King was my teacher. I tried to avoid her which worked out well for me. But some of the other the other children ran afoul of the laws. She would beat your ass in a heartbeat! That winter my mother was released from the nut house. Next thing I know my grandmother told me that I would go to live with her the following summer. To make it up she bought me a bicycle. It was a very bad idea. Once I learned how to use it I was gone. I would travel maybe 10 or 15 miles down the deserted country back roads and never saw any cars. I'd steal change from my uncle Tommy's change bucket and ride 5 miles to Havens Corner market to buy popsicles. The bucket must have had 300 or 400 dollars worth of coins. I only took about dollar which was more than enough money. I'm not sure if my uncle ever caught on. I might have been an unwelcome guest but I was totally free from that "Psycho Trapp Family Crap" when I was on my bike.

But to be fair the Great Depression had really psychologically damaged the whole Trapp clan growing up. Not to mention that catholic bullshit. It made them money nuts with greed and selfishness. I was told that the reason they made me go to live with my mother was because they were afraid I would get hurt and my 75 years old grandmother couldn't keep up with me. But the winds of fate were blowing dark and a twister was headed my way.

In fact a few months before I moved to the city a tornado had ripped the roof off my grandmother's house and pitched it 500 yards into the tractor barn. Ka-Boom! I hid in the root cellar along with my uncle and grandmother while god revealed the strange power of the winds. Gee, maybe I ought to rethink the church stuff? To survive a tornado changes one's perspective. That's when I realized that life was packed to the brim with danger. Maybe the catholic nazis were on to something? Maybe, you could bribe god with money? Nah.

My uncle Butch told me that there was this black family who they were going to "sell" me too. I had never seen a black person. Danger Will Robinson! Danger! I thought they were going to eat me. But once my uncle realized he had crossed the line of my childhood insecurity he arranged for me to ride in the sweetcorn pickup truck. Every year for about 2 weeks he would travel into the black ghetto where he sold 3 ears sweet corn for quarter. He kept a cigar box which held the money and entrusted it to me for making change. The poor black folks loved it when he came to town. Most of the time the truck got empty in an hour or so. He also sometime sold watermelons and strawberries. I didn't understand the black "cracker racism" towards me. But I was overjoyed to discover that they didn't eat white children. Yeah! Fucking A! It wasn't until I moved to Columbus with my mother; on 143 Prescott Street, and started 3rd grade at Saint Francis of Assisi that I was able to grasp the hatred on both sides. I saw something very appealing about their black demeanor. The were very cool. They were not so uptight about making money all the time and were more into having fun. The whole ghetto thing was a disaster but they knew how to laugh and take it easy about doing their business.

My grandmother's family lived on the next farm over. Aunt Fanny and Uncle Bud had a piano in their living room and I would sit for hours trying to make it work. Uncle Bud, like my Uncle Butch chewed "Red Horse" tobacco. They both spit from sunup till sundown. They both tried to get me to chew tobacco but I saw how black and rotten their teeth were. Fuck that! The

women folk wouldn’t let them chew it in the house, but outside there were coffee cans of tobacco spit everywhere. The flys love it. The spider's loved the flies and the dogs loved to piss all over the mess. Uncle Bud had retired from the railroad and became a full time farmer. Bud was a master at bluegrass fiddle. When ever he get liquored up he would square dance and sing while playing the fiddle. He was a sight to behold. Moreover, he was a hell of a shot when it came to spitting too! He could hit a target 15 feet away. If something was important to say he would always end the sentence with “BY HECK!” But every sunday all their farmer asses when to church.

Aunt Fanny and grandmother were into church bingo big time. Every Saturday night they would travel to Saint Paul’s church in Westerville Ohio for bingo. It was the happening thing to do. Nothing but old women gambling. They always would dragged Alfie (me) along too. I hated fucking bingo! I hated fucking church. Bingo! Bingo! Then you would hear about 400 old women cackle and roar just like a fucking hen house at egg collection. They were like dairy cows at milking time, just chewing the shit out of their cuds.
During the week I would wait at the road for the school bus to come. This was the was my first exposure to being around other children. I kept away from them and wasn’t very social. I just didn’t understand how to cope with them. For the most part I ran the fields or watched the Howdy Doody or Mickey Mouse shows. That how I learned how learn how to deal with other kids. Then came the dreaded day and this stranger called “Mom” whisked me away to the First and High area of the OSU campus. Soon I began to marched to the steps of Fly Town culture. The kids were predominantly west virginia hillbillies who always had to fist fight to secure their status in the social order. So now my real journey in all of life’s madness really began. Goodby farm, hello ghetto thugs. It was the land of fists, clubs and knives. No blacks allowed. Fighting was mandatory. Cowards got beat up constantly by bullies. They wait for you to come out of the school yard. Moreover, the racism was impossible to cope with. You could get hurt bad if you crossed into the wrong hood. The plot thickens. Fight or flight, either way you would lose.